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EASTERN EUROPEAN INTELLIGENCER

25 January 1968



Soviet Media Still Mum on Czechoslovak Developments

Through 24 January Soviet media have been exercising extreme caution and giving Czech developments the barest minimum coverage. The US Embassy in Moscow believes the Soviets are disturbed by the appearance in the Czech party press of ideas downgrading the role of the party and stressing individual rights and liberties.

GROUP I
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GRADING AND DECLASSIFICATION

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Russian congratulations to Vasil Bilak, a Ukrainian, on his 23 January election as Slovak party first secretary suggest that the Soviets are not too pleased by this development. The Soviet Consul General in Bratislava delivered a letter from USSR Ambassador Chervonenko in Prague which "congratulated comrade Bilak on his election to his function." This low-key approach is hardly a reflection of the comradely bonhomie that has prevailed on such occasions in the past.

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Czech Writers Defend Selves and Students

In its first move following the ouster of party boss Novotny, the Czechoslovak Writers' Union has issued a statement aimed at regime conservatives and their interpretation of past intellectual dissidence. Published in the current issue of the literary monthly, Plamen, the statement zeroed in on Jan Kolar, chief editor of the cultural weekly, Kulturni Tvorba, whom it accused of tendentious and disparaging reports on last year's turbulent writers congress, and the Prague student demonstrations last October. Kolar is charged with attacking the dissident writers at the congress, "disparaging" the former Writers Union weekly, Literarni Noviny, which had been their mouthpiece, and describing demonstrating students as gangs of hooligans influenced by Western propaganda.

The statement in Plamen then charges Kolar with having taken an "over-simplified" view, and defends both the writers and students as critical Communists who had acted with "good intentions."

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COMMENT: The writers' quick and bold move to set the record straight reflects the new atmosphere of cautious hope among them in the wake of Novotny's demise. They have probably already taken heart from new party boss Dubcek's reported statement that they can have their magazine (Literarni Noviny) "back." Some regime caution concerning the new Writers' Union statement is suggested, however, in the fact that, as far as is known, publicity for it was restricted to Prague's English language broadcast to Africa.

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Conference of Mediterranean "Progressive" Parties Scheduled

A conference of progressive parties and movements of the Mediterranean region will be held in Rome in late March or early April. The decision was announced at the end of a two day consultative meeting in Rome of 16 Mediterranean progressive parties. The host for the spring conference will be the Italian Communist Party and the Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity of Italy.

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COMMENT: The announcement reinforces earlier speculation that the Yugoslavs are having doubts about the scheme and have been replaced by the Italian communists as its main proponents.

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Yugoslav Party Expels Author

The Yugoslav communist party announced the expulsion of author Bozidar Bozovic on 24 January for some of his writings in the literary journal Knjizevne Novine. Decisions in the cases of one of the journal's editors and a columnist were postponed.

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COMMENT: Bozovic may have been purged for publicizing Serbian nationalist views. Knjizevne Novine was criticized at a Belgrade city party meeting on 8 January for favoring Serbian nationalism and opposing the regime's economic and political reforms. One week later a purge of conservatives was started in the Belgrade city party and on 19 January the head of the parent Serbian party was replaced. In enumerating the problems facing the party, outgoing leader Dobrivoje Radosavljevic stressed "considerable remnants of bureaucratic (read Serbian centralist) views and a mistaken approach to the national problem characterized by extreme nationalistic concepts . . ."

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